

Text tailored for NEA 11

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LOS ANGELES -- BERLIN

During recent years of practicing and teaching architecture, the formulation of concepts that deal with future architectural expression has been one of my major goals. My interests in this respect have involved both urban planning issues as well as reflections on the typological and formal development of the language of architecture.

BACKGROUND

I am currently beginning work on a project which involves the two sister-cities Berlin and Los Angeles and which has been scheduled to be published and exhibited at the Aedes Gallery and Architectural Forum in Berlin during the late spring of 1991. This project is a continuation of interests I have pursued for many years and rests on work undertaken in a number of previous architectural competitions and exhibitions.

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After these brief encounters with the world of international architectural competitions, I entered a postgraduate program in Frankfurt, West Germany, which concentrated on issues of future architectural development. Attempts were made to use drawing and model-making as a means to elaborate concepts of future architectural development in a formal as well as programmatic sense. I continued this concern with future-oriented architectural concepts in projects I have later taken on. For an international Japanese-sponsored competition on Architecture and the Electronic Age, (for which project I received second prize in 1987) I tried to elaborate a new architecture for a world of electronic rather than physical exchange.

In 1988 I worked on a project that was to be part of formulating the future shape of Los Angeles. For the West Coast Gateway competition (third prize) I sought to overcome the hazards of highways by using a new horizontal linear structure of parks and buildings, which tried to bring into contact with each other otherwise separated downtown neighborhoods through complex

layers and interconnections.

At the same time I was working on the Los Angeles project, I also took part in an internationally invited exhibition on the future of Berlin (Berlin: Monument to the Past or Model for the Future?). In my project here, I investigated a new type of space in the form of an imploded block structure that sought to transform the compression of the old block interior into a usable space by developing the merits of the block interior into a new public scale and space where cars can be part of the social life through functions like parking, repair, arrival and departure, but are excluded as pure functional machines of transport.

Both projects on the sister-cities Los Angeles and Berlin were investigating the possibilities for a civic space in a city of the twenty-first century where the substructure of private car and public transport is acknowledged as a reality, but not as an obstacle.

My goal for the project proposed here will build on these numerous attempts to define an architecture for the time to come, but will use especially the last two projects described here as a base for further investigation to seek to elaborate elements of a new formal language of architecture that is not bound by the cultural and gender-related constraints of the past.

FRAMEWORK

The increasing awareness that a majority of people (members of the non-western non-male society) have been overlooked within major fields of cultural production (and this definitely includes architecture) burdens our generation with the responsibility of proposing alternatives to inherited cultural patterns. In architecture, the first significant group of women, who entered the field during the 1960s, largely ignored architecture as a field of form-making and concentrated instead on political and social issues, which at that time were very pressing. Today, as a result, not many women are known for their contributions to the formal language of architecture. For this reason, it is extremely important that women begin to deal with form-making in architecture and try to develop their own aesthetic language in terms of inhabitable space.

THE PROPOSED PROJECT

During my studies for the Los Angeles project and the Berlin Project two distinct new concepts of spacial urban formations started to develop. Los Angeles and Berlin will be considered as cities with distinct urban fabrics to research and test out these two concepts of architectural space. To study and develop spacial alternatives in the form of theoretical projects is not new, although it happens rather seldom since such experiments are neither exercises in theoretical reflection, nor practical

applications in the form of specific building proposals, but rather a combination of the two. Nevertheless, there have been projects, produced as part of a theoretical proposal for a new formal and urban concept, that have had an immense impact on architectural production. Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse and the Garden City by Toni Garnier are the two best-known examples.

At first glance, these two cities seem contradictory: Berlin, perched in the heart of Europe, on the border between East and West, the inheritor of long and unfortunate political tradition, now poised for political renewal; Los Angeles: perched on the rim of the economic basin of the twenty-first century, a polyglot monument to the virtues and vices of automotive culture. And yet, although they may seem like an odd couple, these two cities in fact lend themselves to an attempt to elaborate an architectural language of the future.

Both Berlin and Los Angeles are cities with an immense degree of urban void, be it as a result of war or the result of spacemaking for cars. Berlin's center is built around the concept of a block structure and that of Los Angeles around the idea of the singular villa or object like the skyscraper. Both concepts are the result of an extremely demanding speculative market in urban land.

Berlin will be used to develop a concept which is based on a rather female notion of embracement. This newly developed type, which I have described as an imploded block in the Berlin project, is a development or hybrid of the old Berlin block structure combined with the modernist concept of free form letting light and landscape brighten the user's life.

Los Angeles, as the other distinct urban field of study, will be used to search a new type of a horizontal skyscraper -- shall we call it an earthscratcher? -- which I began to elaborate during the West Coast Gateway Competition. The project developed here hovered above the Hollywood Freeway's eight lanes of traffic with various complex structures to connect the downtown area to Chinatown and the Olvera Street area. This new structure relied on the female concept of horizontality and connection and will also be elaborated in the context of this future theoretical project. The Los Angeles project will therefore investigate the formal possibilities of a new horizontal structure that uses the city's airspace in between existing, but socially nonfunctional, structures. The spaces that are to be bridged include mainly highways, but also disconnected megastructures such as Culver City and certain areas of downtown.

To develop these new concepts requires not only drawings and models, but also a formal analysis. The proposal will involve art projects, conceptual drawings, studies of formal developments, as well as texts that concern new spacial concepts dependent on a new female architectural language. This attempt to develop female architectural concepts will involve the discussion of basic spacial concepts, such as object versus wrapping, verticality versus horizontality, exterior orientation versus interior orientation, concentration versus

decentralization, sky versus earth, and so forth. This is, to be sure, an extremely charged field in which so far only very few attempts to work out spacial categories have been made, often formulated in rather banal terms. Nevertheless, if one seeks inspiration in feminist literary criticism one can find examples of a highly conceptual and intellectual content. The same can be said of some among the new female artists. Architects have had difficulties evolving an analogous form of a new, female language since the tendency has been for the discussion to turn away from form to planning issues as form itself is hardly objectively readable. It is in hopes of helping break this stalemate for architecture, that I would like to propose this project.

THE PLANNED PUBLICATION

I already have a commitment to present the outcome of the project in Berlin. The Aedes Gallery in Berlin, one of the best-known architectural galleries in the world, led by Kristin Feireiss, has invited me to exhibit the outcome of my investigation in 1991. The gallery is known for its lack of commercial undertones and for its well-organized and rich exhibitions. It has, for example, just to mention the American architects exhibited there, shown the work of Raimund Abraham (1983), John Hejduk (1984), Venturi, Rauch and Scott-Brown (1987), Bernard Tschumi (1987), Lebbeus Woods (1987), Daniel Libeskind (1987), Peter Eisenman (1989), Frank Gehry (1989) and Morphosis (1990). The exhibition will be accompanied by a book which will contain the abstract formal investigations, theoretical texts as well as the two projects Berlin -- Los Angeles, as a part of the Aedes Gallery and Architectural Gallery Forum, started in 1983.

TIME PLAN

My application is for released time and/or funding to permit realization of the project. The project involves studies in both cities, archival work, a concentrated period of formal analysis, the design and representation of the two design outcomes, the preparation of the exhibition and the accompanying book.

If the financing is available, students will also be involved in the production. The project will start with investigations in both cities during the summer 1990, analysis, abstract formal investigations and carrying out of the Berlin -- Los Angeles projects during the winter period and preparation of the final drawings and models for the exhibition during the spring period with an anticipated opening of the exhibition in Berlin in the summer or late autumn of 1991. The accompanying book with texts, drawings and representations of the projects will have to be finished for the opening as well. The Dean of the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning at UCLA, Richard Weinstein has

given his commitment to either exhibit the project at the UCLA campus or at an other location in Los Angeles. Lebbeus Woods, a member of the committee from the Storefront Gallery in New York has expressed his interest in exhibiting the project in the year 1991.

BIOGRAPHY

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